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The Alcotts in Harvard



HOUSE AT "FRUITLANDS."
From a photograph by Dr. W. O. Johnson.

THE ALCOTTS IN HARVARD

BY

ANNIE M. L. CLARK

LANCASTER, MASSACHUSETTS, U. S. A.

J. C. L. CLARK

1902

A, 166891

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By ANNIE M. L. CLARK

L. M. A

NOTE

A part of these reminiscences having already appeared in the *New England Magazine*, I beg to thank the publishers of that periodical for leave to reprint. To the following persons also I am cordially grateful for information and illustrative matter: MRS. FRANKLIN WYMAN, of Worcester; DR. THOMAS PALMER, of Fitchburg; DR. W. O. JOHNSON, of Clinton; and my son, MR. J. C. L. CLARK. The books by which I have been chiefly aided are the *Life of Alcott* by Messrs. Sanborn and Harris, Mrs. Cheney's *Biography of Miss Alcott*, and L. M. A.'s own "Transcendental Wild Oats."

A. M. L. C.

LANCASTER, Spring, 1902.

The Alcotts in Harvard

EARLY in the summer of 1843, curiosity and interest were aroused in the minds of the inhabitants of the quiet town of Harvard, Massachusetts, by the advent among them of a small colony of that class of high thinkers who had received the name of Transcendentalists. The little colony, sixteen in all, comprised Bronson Alcott and nine other men, Mrs. Alcott, Miss Anna Page, and the four Alcott children. This somewhat incongruous family located itself on a picturesque sidehill farm in the school district of Harvard known as Still River North, but often referred to by the less elegant name of Hog Street.

The founders of this little community were actuated by high and noble motives; and the story of their plans and failures

cannot but be of interest to thoughtful minds. It would be pertinent to trace the mental and moral training and the early homes and environments of the various members; but, as that is not possible, we will, instead, turn a backward glance at the parentage and early lives of those who were the soul and centre of the enterprise.

Amos Bronson Alcott was born in Wolcott, Connecticut, 29 November, 1799, at the foot of Spindle Hill. The family name was originally Alcocke, and is often found in English history. Mention is made that about 1616 a coat-of-arms was granted to Thomas Alcocke, the device being three cocks, emblematic of watchfulness, with the appropriate motto, *Semper vigilans*. One writer says: "Mr. Alcott's ancestors on both sides had been substantial people of respectable position in England, and were connected with the founders and governors of the chief New England colonies."

Brought up on a farm, Alcott has given the story of his quaint, rustic life in the simple verse of "New Connecticut," while Louisa has reproduced it in "Eli's Educa-

tion," one of her Spinning Wheel Stories, which is said to be a very true picture of her father's early days. His mother was a gentle, refined woman, who had strong faith in her boy, and lived to see him the accomplished scholar he had vowed in boyhood to become. In Louisa Alcott's journal occurs this mention of her grandmother:

"Grandma Alcott came to visit us. A sweet old lady. I am glad to know her and see where Father got his nature. As we sat talking over Father's boyhood, I never realised so plainly before how much he has done for himself. His early life sounded like a pretty, old romance, and Mother added the love passages."

From her conversations with her grandmother, Miss Alcott got, as she says, "a hint for a story;" and this story was to be called "The Cost of an Idea." It was to relate "the trials and triumphs of the Pathetic Family," with chapters entitled, "Spindle Hill," "Temple School," "Fruitlands," "Boston," and "Concord." I believe the fear of seeming to present her father's characteristics to ridicule kept her from

fulfilling this purpose; at least, only the Fruitlands chapter—"Transcendental Wild Oats"—ever saw the light.

Mrs. Alcott—Abba May—was the twelfth and youngest child of Colonel Joseph May, of Boston, her mother being Dorothy Sewall. Miss May was visiting her brother, the Rev. Samuel J. May, minister over a Unitarian church in Brooklyn, Connecticut, when she met her future husband. They were married by her brother 23 May, 1830, in King's Chapel, where the bride had been baptised in infancy. It is said that Mrs. May was a woman of rare and charming character, and any one who ever saw Mrs. Alcott can readily believe what she herself wrote of her mother: "She never said great things, but did ten thousand generous ones."

Alcott was farmer boy, peddler, and teacher by turns. In 1832 he was teaching in Germantown, Pennsylvania, where on his thirty-third birthday was born his second daughter, Louisa, whose feet were to mount the ladder of fame higher than his own.

Louisa Alcott's character, which united many of the traits of both parents, may, I think, be aptly described in this quatrain of the great Goethe :

“Vom Vater hab' ich die Statur,
Des Lebens ernstes führen;
Vom Mütterchen die Frohnatur,
Die Lust zu fabulieren.”

From Germantown to Boston and the famous Temple School; and here Alcott was gradually formulating the plan which led to the settlement of Fruitlands, and also strenuously carrying out his conviction that the simplest food was alone conducive to high and lofty thinking and living. We are told that the children grew very tired of rice without sugar, and Graham meal without either butter or molasses.

He was, this high priest of high ideas, very critical in religious matters, writing thus: “I am dissatisfied with the general preaching of every sect and with the individuals of any sect.” Some one has said that he seemed to have adopted what Sir William Davenant called an “ingenuous Quakerism.” Soon the title of philosopher

was added to that of teacher; and he became known as a bright and shining light among the visionary but earnest company of Transcendentalists.

Going to England, he found there congenial spirits, and in October, 1842, he came home, accompanied by three of these new friends, Charles Lane and his son, William, and Henry C. Wright.

Miss Alcott, in "Transcendental Wild Oats," which she further entitles a chapter from an unwritten romance, writes as follows:

"On the first day of June, 1843, a large wagon, drawn by a small horse and containing a motley load, went lumbering over certain New England hills, with the pleasing accompaniments of wind, rain and hail. A serene man with a serene child upon his knee was driving, or rather being driven, for the small horse had it all his own way. Behind a small boy, embracing a bust of Socrates, was an energetic looking woman, with a benevolent brow, satirical mouth and eyes full of hope and courage. A baby reposed upon her lap, a mirror leaned

ON THE ROAD TO PROSPECT HILL.
From a photograph by J. C. L. Clark.

against her knee, a basket of provisions danced about her feet, and she struggled with a large, unruly umbrella, with which she tried to cover every one but herself. Twilight began to fall, and the rain came down in a despondent drizzle, but the calm man gazed as tranquilly into the fog as if he beheld a radiant bow of promise spanning the gray sky." Thus came this new Adam and Eve into their hoped for Eden.

One of the band who were here to make "the wilderness blossom like the rose" wrote thus of Fruitlands, which was the name they decided to give their new home: "It is very remotely situated, without a road, but surrounded by a beautiful green landscape of fields and woods." Nothing could have been more romantic than the site chosen—a field of about a hundred acres on a hillside, sloping to the river, with the most lovely views of Wachusett and Monadnock to the west, the intervening stretches dotted with towns and villages, while in the background rose the tree-crowned summit of Prospect Hill.

Here gathered the little band, and began



the work of forming "a family in harmony with the primitive instincts of man." No meat was to be eaten, nor were fish, butter, cheese, eggs, or milk allowed—nothing that in the taking would cause pain or seem like robbing any animal; besides, animal food, if only approximately animal, as milk and butter, would corrupt the body and through that the soul! Tea, coffee, molasses, and rice, were forbidden for two reasons—because they were in part foreign luxuries, and in part the product of slave labour. Water alone for drink, fruit in plenty, and some vegetables, were permitted; but in these last a distinction was made between those which grow in the air and those which grow downward, like potatoes and others which form underground. The latter were less suited for what these visionaries termed a "chaste supply" for their bodily needs. Louisa Alcott says that ten ancient apple trees were all the "chaste supply" the place afforded. Salt was another article forbidden, it is hard to see why. Maple syrup and sugar were to be abundant in time, and bayberry tallow was to furnish

ORCHARD AT "FRUITLANDS."
From a photograph by J. C. L. Clark.



light, when anything but the inner light was required. All this was to elevate and purify the body and bring about a state of perfection in body, mind, and soul.

The following are some of the principles upon which their habits of life were to rest: "We must ignore laws which ignore holiness; our trust is in purity; with pure beings will come pure habits; a better being shall be built up from the orchard and the garden; the outward form shall beam with soul." "From the fountain we will slake our thirst, and our appetite shall find supply in the delicious abundance which Pomona offers. Flesh and blood we will reject as the accursed thing. A pure mind has no faith in them."

Certain ideas called "no government theories" held sway in Alcott's breast, which just before his going to Harvard led to his arrest by the deputy sheriff, Sam Staples, for refusing to pay his taxes, on the ground that he would "not support a government so false to the law of love." And here I must digress to tell what Thoreau calls a good anecdote. Miss Helen

Thoreau asked Sheriff Staples what he thought Mr. Alcott's idea was; and he answered, with hearty if inelegant emphasis, "I vum, I believe it was nothing but principle, for I never heard a man talk honest." Even those who most thoroughly disbelieved in the practicability of the reformer's views were ready to concede his entire honesty of purpose. Emerson called Alcott "a nineteenth century Simon Stylites."

With these qualities, he set out for Fruitlands—the name, like everything else fine about these plans, but a prophecy. The projects of these people were, as Emerson was fond of describing them, "without feet or hands." Ordinary farming was not part of their plan of life. No ploughs were to be used because they would require the aid of cattle; the spade and the pruning-knife were to be all-sufficient. None of the company was used to the labour required, and of course blistered hands and intense weariness were common; but the All-soul disciples struggled bravely on for a few months, yielding at last so far to the inevitable as to allow a yoke of

cattle to be used in performing the hardest tasks. In the half droll, half pathetic pages of "Transcendental Wild Oats," it is asserted that one of the supposititious oxen was a cow, and that the owner used to take long draughts at the milking pail in the privacy of the barn. The truth is that Joseph Palmer, a member of the community, of whom I shall have something to tell later, brought from his home in Leominster a cow and a bull, which he had trained to work together. He was the original of Moses White in Miss Alcott's story, in which, with a decorous alteration, this incident figures. It is said that some others of the family were glad to share the less frugal meals of kindly neighbours, though this was probably never true of Alcott.

Their dress was another matter held of great importance. Cotton was largely the product of slave labour, and wool came from robbing the sheep, so linen was as far as possible to form the material of their garments. One cannot help but wonder how men with any common sense could dream of living through our New England year

clad in linen. While summer and summer warmth lasted, many deprivations could be overlooked, though even then Mrs. Alcott's shoulders must have found heavy burdens for their upholding. The rest might be seeking the All-soul; but to her fell the task, often almost beyond her powers, of providing for their physical needs, which even with their high philosophy could not be wholly overlooked.

The education of the children was not neglected. Miss Page gave them music lessons; and Louisa frankly declares she hated the lady, she was "so fussy." From their father and Mr. Lane they had instruction in various branches. Louisa in her diary tells of things pleasant and the reverse; how she tried to be good, and how she failed; of a visit from Parker Pillsbury, and his talk about the poor slaves; of their dinners of bread and fruit; how they played in the woods and were fairies, and how she "fled" the highest of all; and of a corn-husking in the barn, with the somewhat unusual incident, if one may judge by its being recorded, that they had lamps. Indeed, a kinswoman

VIEW FROM PROSPECT HILL.
From a photograph by F. T. Harvey.



of Mrs. Alcott's tells me that her occasional insistence on ordinary means of lighting (bayberry tallow not being as yet available) called forth much reproachful opposition. Louisa writes of a visit from Professor William Russell, and a Sunday's tramp in the woods for moss to adorn a bower their father was making, in which Mr. Emerson was to be honoured. Louisa wrote little poems and read and listened to various books. Mrs. Child's "Philothea" was a great favourite with the little girls, so much so that they made a dramatic version of it, which they acted under the trees. That the father encouraged his children in their innocent gayety is shown by the family habit of celebrating birthdays. Thus, when May was three years old, 28 July of the summer spent at Fruitlands, the whole family met under the trees of a neighbouring grove, and, crowning the little girl with flowers, Mr. Alcott read an ode celebrating the day in the child's honour, and as the dawn of their opening paradise.

Emerson's ideas had been an incentive in the establishment of the community; but

much as he sympathised with the pure idealism of their plans, he never seemed to believe in their practical value, and, again, called Alcott "a tedious archangel," and said that Alcott and Lane were "always feeling of their shoulders to see if their wings were sprouting." Hawthorne wrote of Alcott: "One might readily conceive his Orphic sayings to well up from a fountain in his breast which communicated with the infinite Abyss of thought." His English friend, Mr. Wright, soon pronounced him impractical. Thoreau, with many kindred beliefs, was sometimes vexed with him; and Lowell, as if in prophecy, wrote:

"Our nipping climate hardly suits
The ripening of ideal fruits,
His theories vanquish us all summer,
But winter makes him dumb and dumber."

Some of the members of the family went visiting at Brook Farm, and came home shocked at the luxury and epicureanism they found. Young Isaac Hecker came to Fruitlands from the larger community, as he wished to lead a more self-denying life. After a stay of two weeks, however,

he departed, still unsatisfied, to enter at last the Catholic priesthood.* People of strange dress and stranger ideas came and went, largely drones in the world's workaday hive; and the Newness, the All-soul, must have been written in other words for overworked, tired Mrs. Alcott. Alcott and Lane went to New York to hold a discussion with W. H. Channing. Lydia Maria Child, who was a dear personal friend of the Alcotts, gives a somewhat amusing account of the matter. Mr. Child and John Hopper had been to hear the discussion, and Mrs. Child asked what had been talked about. Mr. Child said: "Mr. Lane divided man into three states, the disconscious, the conscious, and the unconscious; the disconscious is the state of a pig, the conscious is the baptism by water, and the unconscious is the baptism by fire. And as for myself," he added, "when I had heard them talk for

* In August, 1844, Father Hecker, then a Catholic convert, visited Harvard with Emerson, and seems to have called on Alcott, at Still River, and on Charles Lane, who was probably still with the Harvard Shakers. For Lane's unselfishness and singleness of character Hecker always retained admiration. His comments on Alcott, made late in life to his biographer, Father Elliott, are more amusing than complimentary.

a few moments, I didn't know whether I *had* any mind or not." Hopper declared that while Channing thought there was some connection between mind and body, Alcott and Lane seemed to think the body a sham.

In Louisa's diary we find what she calls a "sample of the vegetable wafers we used at Fruitlands:"

"Vegetable diet and sweet repose; animal food and nightmare."

"Apollo eats no flesh and has no beard; his voice is melody itself."

"Pluck your body from the orchard, do not snatch it from the shambles."

These are a few of the oracular instructions the children received from the philosophers.

As cool weather came on, times grew harder. We find in Louisa's diary, under one date: "More people coming to live with us; I wish we could be together, and no one else. I don't see who is to feed and clothe us all, when we are so poor now. I was very dismal, and then went out to walk, and made a poem." This poem is entitled "Despondency;" it is interesting, denoting,

as it does, the loving trust which showed itself in the young heart thus early learning of life's burdens, a trust which is again shown in the record, of a little later date, when she tells of going under the forest trees and coming out into the sunshine, and of the strange and solemn feeling that came over her—that she, as she expresses it, “felt God as never before, and prayed that she might keep that happy sense of nearness all her life.” This is the poem. Surely these lines are good for a girl not quite eleven years old :

“Silent and sad
When all is glad
And the earth is dressed in flowers ;
When the gay birds sing
Till the forests ring
As they rest in woodland bowers.

“Oh, why these tears
And these idle fears
For what may come to-morrow?
The birds find food
From God so good,
And the flowers know no sorrow.

“If He clothes these,
And the leafy trees,
Will He not cherish thee?
Why doubt His care?
It is everywhere,
Though the way we may not see.

“Then why be sad
When all is glad
And the world is full of flowers?
With the gay birds sing,
Make life all spring,
And smile through the darkest hours.”

One after another those who had composed the family departed, Lane and his son going to the Shakers for a while, and considerably later returning to England. Alcott also, I believe, was inclined to join the followers of Mother Ann Lee; but to this his wife utterly refused to agree. An old neighbour once told me that Mrs. Alcott said her hope for her daughters was that they should become wives and mothers; and life among the Shakers was apparently not likely to bring about that happy result. Alcott grew more and more discouraged. As his daughter says, he lay down upon his bed and turned his face to the wall, refusing food and drink, and there waited for death to end the struggle. For a while tears and pleading from the faithful wife were of no avail, and she could only cling to the words which expressed the belief of her devout but incapable husband, “The Lord will pro-

vide.” It would seem that at last some kind angel brought the stricken man to see the selfishness of yielding to despair, when his wife and children were alike suffering and it was his duty to care for them. Some arrangements were made; and one cold December day the little family left Fruitlands—which the mother suggested might more appropriately have been called “Apple Slump”—for a home in the village of Still River, in a part of the house known as the “Brick Ends,” then owned and in part occupied by J. W. Lovejoy.* It is comforting to recall that, although Alcott, brave in his convictions, withstood the wintry blasts in his customary linen leggings, the broad-brimmed hats and linen tunics of the little girls gave way to warmer garments sent by friends and relatives. Still more delightful is it to know that Mrs. Alcott, like many another weary woman, found comfort in “cups that cheer but not inebriate,” and now and then went to a sympathetic neighbour’s to make herself a cup of tea.

* It is now the home of Mr. Harvey Keyes. Its brick ends on the north and south were long ago replaced by wood.

Of course queer stories had come to the villagers regarding the Transcendentalists; so when one Sunday a long-haired man walked into the Still River (Baptist) church, interrupting the service to proclaim himself the Angel Gabriel, I think the incident seemed, though unfortunate, not altogether out of character. Gabriel, however, may have made Fruitlands his headquarters after the place had passed into the hands of Joseph Palmer, who, because of his immense beard, when full beards were very rarely seen, was known as the "Old Jew."

Palmer's maternal grandfather was Captain Noah Wiswall, of Newton. His son and daughter having married children of a Mr. Palmer, said to have been a schoolmaster, Wiswall presented the two young couples with adjoining farms in the unincorporated tract called Notown. These two farms were part of a military grant inherited by Captain Wiswall. The daughter's portion was later joined to Leominster. She had fourteen children, of whom Joseph was the youngest. To him was left the Leominster farm, and from him it descended to his

MONUMENT TO JOSEPH PALMER, LEOMINSTER, MASS.

From a photograph by J. C. L. Clark.



son, Dr. Thomas Palmer, a noted dentist of Fitchburg, now over eighty years old. The cottage built in the eighteenth century by Dr. Palmer's grandfather is yet standing near the doctor's modern summer residence. Joseph married Nancy Thompson, of Sterling, whose father, Benjamin Thompson, was a cousin of Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford, originally of Woburn.

When the community was started, the farm in Harvard, with its buildings, was purchased of one Maverick Wyman. The money for the land was contributed chiefly by Charles Lane. The buildings were bought by Joseph Palmer, who was in sympathy with the Transcendentalists and glad to aid in the scheme.

After the collapse of the community, the trusteeship of the land, which had been held for Charles Lane by the Rev. Samuel J. May, Mrs. Alcott's brother, was transferred to R. W. Emerson (March, 1845). In August, 1846, the land was deeded by Emerson, as trustee, to Palmer, "in consideration of seventeen hundred dollars," although the purchase money was in great part secured

to Lane by mortgage. The land carried also a mortgage of three hundred dollars, held by one Godfrey Sparrow. By 1852 the place was cleared of all incumbrances by Palmer's son, Dr. Thomas Palmer. It was the home of the "Old Jew" and of a daughter, Mrs. Holman, to the end of their lives. Since Mrs. Holman's death, the property has been sold by her sons to Mr. Abel Willard, whose farm it adjoined. Mr. Palmer is buried in the large cemetery at Leominster, his monument bearing his portrait in relief, beneath which are the words: "Persecuted for wearing the beard."

With the spring the Still River little folks found their new neighbours a welcome accession. A May party, with queen and maypole, was, I think, an idea of the young Alcotts, whose knowledge of historic customs was greater than that possessed by the rest of us. A recent writer has called them "sad-faced children." That is a great mistake. Whatever they may have lacked in everyday comforts, they never could have been rightly described by such a term. As sure as the sun shone and skies were blue,

Page, reduced, of mortgage, showing signatures of R. W. Emerson
and Charles Lane, and mortgage note signed by Joseph Palmer.

By courtesy of Dr. Thomas Palmer.

Now, and Mr. Lyneal 1846
has taken receipt of money that he has
given to pay him on order in bond for Charles Lamer
and hundred dollars in three years from this date
with interest after one year.

Wm. J. Nancy Holman
Calm
Wm. J.

Joseph Palmer

just so sure was the afternoon gathering on the grass plot in front of the "Brick Ends," and all of us enjoyed jumping rope, tossing ball and rolling hoop (so it seems to me now) as never before. Mrs. Alcott was like the guardian angel of the merry company, often taking her seat in our midst and smiling benignly upon our gay pranks.

In the bright days of summer came the birthday of Lizzie, the "Beth" of "Little Women;" and never shall I forget the proud gladness which filled my childish heart as I went to the party given in honour of the day. Mrs. Lovejoy's kitchen was set about with evergreens, and otherwise rendered a fitting stage for the evening's entertainment. Her sitting-room was the dress circle, while the Alcott sitting-room was ornamented by a small tree, from the boughs of which hung gifts, not only for our small hostess, but for each little friend present. In the adjoining kitchen a table was abundantly laden with little cakes and luscious cherries, with a big birthday cake in the centre.

I cannot recall all the dramatic scenes enacted that evening, to me so memorable.

There was part of an old English play given by the older of the happy party, members of the Alcott and the neighbouring Gardner families. Then there were songs; and Anna Alcott appeared as a Scotch laddie, in bonnet and plaid. What she recited I have forgotten, though I remember how pretty she looked. But Louisa was the star of the evening. Her mother had stained her face, arms, neck and ankles to the ruddy hue of an Indian girl; her dress seemed made all of feathers; feathers, too, crowned her head. Three times she made her appearance. Once, according to her own recollection, she sang the then popular song, "Wild roved an Indian girl, bright Alfarata." Then erect, solemn as her merry face could become, she strode forward, bearing a large shield, and in almost blood-curdling accents—as an old schoolmate describes them—repeated the passage from Ossian beginning, "O thou that rollest above, round as the shield of my fathers;" and again, in tenderer, softer accents, a poem from one of the school readers:

“Geehale—An Indian Lament.

“The blackbird is singing on Michigan’s shore
As sweetly and gaily as ever before;
For he knows to his mate he, at pleasure, can hie,
And the dear little brood she is teaching to fly;
The sun looks as ruddy, and rises as bright,
And reflects o’er our mountains as beamy a light
As it ever reflected, or ever expressed,
When my skies were the bluest, my dreams were the best.
The fox and the panther, both beasts of the night,
Retire to their dens on the gleaming of light,
And they spring with a free and a sorrowless track,
For they know that their mates are expecting them back.
Each bird and each beast, it is blessed in degree;
All nature is cheerful, all happy, but me.

“I will go to my tent, and lie down in despair;
I will paint me with black, and will sever my hair;
I will sit on the shore, where the hurricane blows,
And reveal to the god of the tempest my woes;
I will weep for a season, on bitterness fed,
For my kindred are gone to the hills of the dead;
But they died not by hunger, or lingering decay;
The steel of the white man hath swept them away.

“This snake-skin, that once I so sacredly wore,
I will toss, with disdain, to the storm-beaten shore;
Its charms I no longer obey, or invoke;
Its spirit hath left me, its spell is now broke.
I will raise up my voice to the source of the light;
I will dream on the wings of the bluebird at night;
I will speak to the spirits that whisper in leaves,
And that minister balm to the bosom that grieves;
And will take a new Manito—such as shall seem
To be kind and propitious in every dream.

“Oh! then I shall banish these cankering sighs,
And tears shall no longer gush salt from my eyes;

I shall wash from my face every cloud-coloured stain,
Red, red shall, alone, on my visage remain !
I will dig up my hatchet, and bend my oak bow ;
By night and by day I will follow the foe ;
Nor lakes shall impede me, nor mountains, nor suows ;—
His blood can, alone, give my spirit repose.

“They came to my cabin, when heaven was black ;
I heard not their coming, I knew not their track ;
But I saw, by the light of their blazing fuses,
They were people engendered beyond the big seas :
My wife, and my children,—oh spare me the tale !
For who is there left that is kin to GEEHALE ? ”

It was all so wonderful to us little ones ;
and I well remember how the next day we
looked to see if any remnant of the paint
was left on Louisa’s pretty neck and arms.

Miss Louisa Chase, who taught the vil-
lage school that summer, was fairly en-
shrined in the hearts of her pupils ; and the
rides and picnics in which Miss Chase and
Mrs. Alcott watched over, and shared in,
the happiness of the little people I shall
never forget. Hay-carts would be provided
with seats and trimmed with evergreen ; and
carefully stowing away our luncheon-bask-
ets, we one by one would take our seats in
the rustic omnibuses, and start away, sing-
ing and laughing, for a long day’s pleasure.

Mr. Alcott was too much engaged in

"BRICK ENDS,"

From a photograph by J. C. L. Clark.



philosophising and gardening to share in such merry-makings; but a lady, who was in those days one of the Still River school-girls, tells me of one occasion when he did attend a picnic at the school-house. I have an impression that it was held on the Fourth of July, and very likely Mr. Alcott had been asked to speak. One can well believe that the doughnuts, cold meat, pickles, cakes, and pies, usually served on such occasions, were little to his taste; and, indeed, when there were passed to him some delicate cookies, contributed by the minister's wife, by whose side, unfortunately, he was sitting, the philosopher declined them with a wave of the hand, and the words, "Vanity, and worse than vanity!"

Of the merry Alcott group and their intimates, Louisa was the ring-leader whenever and wherever there was a chance to "have some fun." She often, as she says, "got mad;" but her anger went as quickly as it came. Still she *could* be severe. One day the neighbours were astonished to see a chair suspended from one of the "Brick Ends" windows. It appeared that Louisa,

while "cleaning house" with great energy, had "bumped" herself against a chair, whereupon that devoted article of furniture was arraigned, found guilty, and immediately hanged!

Another tale is related by the school-mate who was Louisa's most intimate Still River friend. Calling at the Alcott's one day, she found Louisa in a little hall chamber, where she had been sentenced to remain till she was sorry for speaking disrespectfully to her mother; at present, she was not sorry. She confided to her friend, who remarked a peculiar odour, that, as she *must* stay there, she had thought it a good time to oil her hair, which she had been doing, most lavishly, with some of poor Mrs. Alcott's whale-oil! A recollection caused the prisoner shortly to declare she could stay indoors no longer. Deaf to her visitor's remonstrances, she explained that the day before she had accidentally killed a spider in the pasture, and must needs go and look at his monument, which she had erected. So the two little girls crept softly down stairs and out through the garden,

successfully avoiding the notice of Mr. Alcott, who was busy hoeing. The monument proved to be a shingle fixed in the ground, bearing an epitaph appropriate to the unfortunate spider.* All this seems very much like a chapter from one of Miss Alcott's stories.

Well do I remember my childish distress over an incident at school. Miss Chase, doubtless weary of the mending of some forty quills, had gladly welcomed the innovation of steel pens. I was very proud of the one she had given me; but one day, alas! Louisa in a spirit of mischief seized the quill-handle into which my pen was fitted, and threw it into the middle of the floor, spoiling the point, and filling my little heart with pain. A pleasanter recollection is of the first banana I ever tasted, one which Lizzie Alcott shared with me, and which I remember she called "bread fruit."

* The same friend tells me that a certain large rock on the border of lovely Bear Hill Pond was named by Louisa "Spiderland," and that from this favourite resort she used to write notes to her friends. Her evident regard for these creepy insects—are they, indeed, insects?—reminds one of George Macdonald's story of "The Giant's Heart."

Sweet, clever Anna Alcott—"Meg"—used to write little stories in a blank book; and I can fancy myself now walking very slowly home from school, along the broad green sidewalk between the corner and Mr. Orasmus Willard's, with my dear playmates, Lizzie Alcott and Helen Lovejoy, while Anna read to us what seemed very wonderful tales.

Taught that the eating of meat was wrong, the Alcott children looked, of course, upon any form of butchering as a veritable crime, and many were the spirited debates which Lizzie and I had on the subject. Fruits, grains, and vegetables made up the sum of *their* home diet; but, like some of the older Fruitlanders, they were not averse from sharing more varied food, provided at picnics and other rural festivities. Kind friends and relatives, as I have mentioned, sent them, besides baskets of fruit, many articles of clothing; and it would seem as if this brief, bright summer must have been a welcome relief to Mrs. Alcott from the toil and care with which she had been burdened at Fruitlands.

An anecdote of Mrs. Alcott's Still River life well illustrates her generous nature. In the same village was a lady of ample means, and possessing true refinement, who paid little or no attention to prevailing styles. While of excellent materials, her clothes were, indeed, far enough from the fashion. Among a quantity of garments sent to Mrs. Alcott by friends were several bonnets, and great was Mrs. ——'s good-humoured astonishment when Mrs. Alcott, in the most delicate manner, offered one of them to her! Although the bonnet was not accepted, I have no doubt that these two good women were drawn closer by an incident which, if shared by less noble characters, might have ended unhappily.

We were all very sorry when our beloved playmates went back to Concord. Once, not many years later, Louisa was so anxious to see Still River again that she walked from Concord to visit the Gardners. She often thought of the summer spent in Still River, as is shown by the use in her stories of the names of people she had known there, and by some of her letters. In one here repro-

duced, which was written to me more than thirty years ago, she speaks of the "old Still River days" as "jolly times," and describes a mock wedding in the woodshed, in which she took the part of bride. The friend I have referred to so often, Sophia (Gardner) Wyman, says that this ceremony was conducted after the gipsy manner, the bride and groom jumping together over a broomstick which was held by S. and another playmate.

The second letter which I give in facsimile, written fifteen years later, expresses kindly approbation of a *Wide Awake* story of mine relating to "Beth's" birthday party, and alludes to the happy days spent at Still River. These two letters show the great change which took place in Miss Alcott's handwriting, the result, I believe, of writer's cramp.

Another letter, which Mrs. Wyman has kindly allowed me to copy, was written the year after the Alcotts' removal from Still River. It evidently refers in part to the return from a visit to the Gardners, on which occasion Anna very likely accompa-

July 13th -

Dear Mrs. Clark. }

There is nothing
to alter in the story
but the word "Abba"
very oblige to it so
much that I have
marked it out. Also

girl. I fancy I saw
"Bright Alpaca" on an
afternoon walk.

I recollect little
Ann Maria's assurance
one of the "poor children"
who played with our dog.
"Bark" is dead long ago;

the respectful "this"
before our names or
then sound better
without it & we don't
mind.

I do not remem-
ber the party as we
had so many, but it
sounds very healthy
especially the Indian

to that of the mother. The
dear & the mother inter-
acting is as.

Nothing is more
so very kind than
all the good

St. J. J.

nied Louisa. The "P. S." and "N. B." remind one of Tommy Bangs's letter to his grandmother in "Little Men." I have followed the original *verbatim et litteratim*, but not quite *punctuatim*.

"CONCORD, Tuesday, 23[d].

"Dear Sophia :

"I had nothing to do, so I thought I would scribble a few lines to my dear Fire, as Abby still calls you. I have just written a long letter to L—— all myself, for mother is too buisy and Anna to[o] lazy. I supose M—— will schold if I call Anna lazy, but she is to[o] lazy to do any thing but drum on the Seraphine till we are all stuned with her noise. I need not tell you we are all alive and kicking, most of our family, that is; Miss F—— and S—— are going away, so I shan't have to be fussed any more with them, for Miss F—— is particular and S—— is cross. I have not forgotten the ten matches we lit on a certain night, and my head and bones still shake after the beating they got when I was at Harvard. O, if you had only been with us when we came home!—a stage full of bawling babies and nervous marms to take care of the little dears. I had to be perched on top of the stage, and pitched up and down like butter in a churn. I had a beautiful walk the other day with my governess and the children to a pond called Finch pond, there we found lots of grape[e]s and some lovely flowers; and now, if you won't laugh, I'll tell you something—if you will believe it, Miss F—— and all of us waded across it, a great big pond a mile long and half a mile wide, we went splashing along making the fishes run like mad before our big claws, when we got to the other side we had a funny time getting on our shoes and unmentionables, and we came tumbling home all wet and muddy; but we were happy enough, for we came through the woods bawling and singing like crazy folks. Yesterday we went over

a little way from our house into some great big fields full of apple-trees, which we climbed, tearing our clothes off our backs (luckly they were old) and breaking our bones [!], playing tag and all sorts of strange things. We are dreadfull wild people here in Concord, we do all the sinful things you can think of. I have got some hous[e] plants; one of them is called a Crab Cactus, the flower looks like a toad and the leaves look as if they were joined together by a very fine thread. The folks were very much pleased with my fruit, but the grapes were crushed some in tumbling in and out of the cars.* I have been pressing coloured leaves, they look very pretty when they are arranged prettly on white paper. I go to school every day to Mr. Lane, but do not have half so good a time as I did at Miss Chase's school; the summer I went there was the happiest summer I ever spent in the country, there was such a lot of jolly girls to play and blab with, and we used to have such good times—though we did used to get mad now and then, it did not last long. I went to court and heard William Whyman acquitted. I hopped right up out of my seat when the foreman said Not Guilty. Poor Mr. Whyman! he cried right out, he was so glad; his trial has lasted three years and the poor man's hair has turned gray, though it was black at first, they have plagued him so.† What a silly fool I am to be talking to you about things you do not care about hearing, so I will stop. I shall make you a visit next summer, if you will not come down and see me. Mother said she would pay the postage, so I will scribble with all my might. Our garden looks dreadful shabby, for Father has been gone to New York for a long time and Mr. Lane does not under stand garden- ing very well. I must say good by uow, for I must go and prac-

* The little girls no doubt went by stage as far as Littleton, continuing their journey to Concord by the then new and wonderful Fitchburg Railroad.

† The case against William Wyman for embezzlement grew out of the failure in 1842 of the Phœnix Bank of Charlestown, of which Wyman was president. He would appear to have been acquitted of a portion of the charges against him before the Court of Common Pleas at Concord in June, 1845. The case was finally "non prossed" at Cambridge the following February.

MARM WEBBER'S COTTAGE.
From a photograph by J. C. L. Clark.



tise for an hour, farewell. Mother sends her love to all the dear folks, and Abby lots to G——; by, by, dear childer,

“the lord [*sic*] bless you,

“from your affectionate

“friend LOUISA.

“P. S. If you and M—— will come down and see us, I will light ten matches for you, and you shall have a nice big room—if you will only come without delay, for our lives depend upon it, so come with the greatest possible despatch; bring little P—— two [too] for Abby; my respects to Walter, and tell him my finger is better and I hope his is too; hope A—— is better, tell her to get well as fast as she can and come with you; I hope Betty G. won't turn her nose up at me the next time I come, for it most broke my heart, it was so affecting; good by, L. M. A.

“N. B. Now I have written you a long letter, and you must answer it, M—— must not write a word in it, must be all for me.* I pray and beg you will not show this to any body and [will] excuse all mistakes, for I am in a hurry; did you ever see the time when I was not?

“L. M. A.

“I won't say any more now, my dear S.”

To one who knows the destitute circumstances of the Alcott family at this period, the little Louisa's somewhat airy references to summers in the country and “my governess” may afford innocent mirth.

In the chapter of “Little Men” where Dan tells the story of “Marm Webber,”

* That is to say, if Margaret wrote, it would be to Anna. The little Alcotts' intimacies were, like most children's, formed through similarity of age: Margaret Gardner “went with” Anna Alcott; Sophy Gardner with Louisa; to Helen Lovejoy and me Lizzie was our dearest friend; and Louisa conjures Sophy to bring Polly for little Abba May.

Miss Alcott was portraying a Still River character. On the slope of Prospect Hill there actually lived a Mrs. Webber, whose house was a hospital for homeless and unfortunate cats. Whatever were the old dame's faults of temper, she was a true friend to her feline pets, although her putting the hopeless invalids out of their misery with ether is a touch of Miss Alcott's fancy, since, I believe, that anæsthetic had not been invented in the real Marm Webber's time.

I well remember how great was the interest felt by old Still River schoolmates when, in the *Saturday Evening Gazette*, articles began to appear written by the merry girl who had left so strong an impression on our minds. Right proud were we when "Little Women" followed the pathetic pages of "Hospital Sketches;" and loyal hearts rejoiced in each later success, and mourned when the life lived so faithfully for others ended so early.

